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**CONTEMPORARY MUSIC FESTIVAL,
HUDDERSFIELD
OCTOBER 13-17, 1978**

JOHN SHEPHERD

It was the week of 'l'affaire Boycott'. The Cricket Committee of the Yorkshire County Cricket Club Committee (a tautology I shall never really fathom) had suddenly announced that The Greatest Right-Handed Batsman In The World would cease to captain Yorkshire. Michael Parkinson's brow became furrowed. The honour of Barnsley was at stake (must get our Geoffrey on the show so that he can defend himself). There were imputations of disloyalty to Yorkshire Cricket on the part of the Great Man. Up and down the Holme Valley (where I happen to live) pints were drunk, sleeves were rolled up and arguments of great moral persuasion were brought to bear. I started to draw comparisons with Dreyfus. 'Who's he? the cry went up. I muttered something about centre-forward for England in the 1930s.

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What I needed was some Culture, a breath of cosmopolitan fresh air. As luck would have it, there was a festival of contemporary music just down the road at Huddersfield. So I removed myself from my haven in 'the spectacular woollen district of the Pennines' (as the publicity blurb would have it) to 'grimy industrial' Huddersfield (an image, we were assured, that had been 'dispelled by the cleaning of numerous buildings').

The Festival was to have been built round three major attractions: the first visit to Britain, in a professional capacity, of George Crumb, two concerts by the Gaudeamus Quartet and one by the Warsaw Music Workshop. In the event, the Gaudeamus Quartet became fogbound in Amsterdam and two replacement concerts had to be arranged at very short notice. The first (on the evening of Saturday, October 14) was given jointly by Rohan de Saram (this a very noble gesture, since this cellist had already given a demanding recital in the morning, of which more later) and Alan Hacker and friends (clarinets). In the first half Rohan de Saram played Kodály's unaccompanied Sonata for cello with great panache and then, with Douglas Young (piano), proceeded to give an interesting account of the recently unearthed and published *Melancholia* by Sibelius. *Melancholia* (1902) is essentially episodic, alternating on the one hand between piano and cello passages and, on the other, between dry pizzicato chords and an elegiac questioning: a questioning which towards the end of the work is given a lilting, sardonic answer. The first half of the concert closed with a repeat performance (from the morning recital) of George Crumb's Sonata for cello.

The second half was less prepossessing. The performance of an ancient Delphic Hymn (138 B.C.) and music from the Greek/Turkish folk clarinet tradition holds, one would have thought, minimal interest for contemporary music aficionados. William Sweeney's *Nine Days* (1977), which concluded the evening, was a statement motivated by the nine days of the 1926 General Strike. It consisted of variations on different Scottish (or pseudo-Scottish) folk melodies above a drone bass: hypnotic perhaps, solemn and even dire, but hardly presenting any philosophical or political depth. The second replacement concert (on the Sunday morning) was given by the Lindsay Quartet and consisted of Elizabeth Maconchy's Eleventh Quartet and Hugh Wood's Third. Neither can be recommended as an aperitif.

The concert which stayed longest in the memory was that given by Dreamtiger (director, Douglas Young) with Peter Hill (piano) on the Sunday evening. The first half consisted entirely of works by George Crumb. Crumb had given a lecture on Saturday afternoon on 'My vocal settings of Lorca's poetry'. He is hardly the ideal lecturer: diffident, difficult to hear and conveying, in a gentle, unassuming way, an anti-academicism which prevents him saying anything of great substance. The basic message was clear, however. The words used by the Spanish poet inspire the timbres (often fragile) and so, in Crumb's case, much of the form that underlies the American composer's musical language. That language came across instrumentally in the evening in the initially troubled and subsequently serene *Night Music II* (1964), in the delicate fragrance of the slightly overstretched *Dream Sequence* (1976: this performance was a European première) and in the exquisitely beautiful *Vox Balaenae* (1971). This last piece was inspired by the singing of the humpback whale and seeks to symbolise the powerful, impersonal, timeless yet rhythmic forces of nature. To say any more about the work would be to go totally against its ethos (and that of most of Crumb's music). It has to be heard to be believed. The second half of the concert contained a cheeky, fun piece by Douglas Young (*Lignes*, 1978) for piccolo and claves that lasted at least 45 seconds, and an excellent performance by Douglas Young and Peter Hill of Stravinsky's two piano version of *The Rite of Spring*.

Following close in terms of memorability was the recital given on the Saturday morning by Rohan de Saram and Douglas Young. It began with the Debussy Sonata (as much for piano as for cello), proceeded through an unscheduled performance of the 1896 Delius *Romance* to Janáček's *A Fairy Tale* (which again gave Douglas Young equal exposure), and thence to George Crumb's Sonata for solo cello (1955). This is a student work which betrays the influence of Bartók and Hindemith. The first of the three movements frames an impassioned and expansive melodic

arch within sombre pizzicato chords, and with its continuing rising quality seems to pose a question. The second, conversation-like movement discusses this question which is then answered in the third. This is heralded by a slow dramatic 'call to action', which precipitates an allegro vivace of powerful momentum.

The remaining two works in the recital were Xenakis's *Kottos*, an intense piece, the rapid ostinati of which — symptomatic of musical branchings and re-branchings — led to a tight ending, and Frank Bridge's Sonata for cello and piano (1914-17). Bridge's Sonata was written at a turning point in his career, before the influence of the Second Viennese School on him began to be fully felt. Yet the second of the three symphonic-like movements (played without a break) is complex in structure and sonority and has clear allegiances with Schoenberg. It was a fascinating piece to end a recital throughout which the playing of both soloists was committed, energetic and convincing.

The Festival contained within it the last stage of the Yorkshire Arts Association's Young Composer's Competition. The principal public forum for works reaching this stage was a concert given by the Aulos Ensemble (directors, John Casken and Philip Wilby) on the Monday evening. Three pieces by young composers were included: *Scales, Sets and Filters* by Christopher Fox, *A Dialogue from Faustus* by David Morris and *Aware* by Michael Parkin. *Aware* (1978) describes 'a mood or moment of crisis between seeing the transience of the world and its inherent timelessness'. The pointillistic structure of this piece at times allowed it to slip into over-statement and to get caught up in its own powers of expression. Given the Japanese inspiration for the work, the mood sometimes came suspiciously close to betraying a Western agony of self-consciousness. Nonetheless, the writing was impressive and the serenity of *Aware's* coda was appropriately static and impersonal.

The three young composers' works were interspersed with another three by rather more established figures: John Buller (*Spaci*, this a British première), John Casken (*Music for a Tawny-Gold Day*) and Philip Wilby (*Surrexit Christus*, another British première). *Music for a Tawny-Gold Day* (1975) recommended itself most. For this piece the Aulos Ensemble was divided predominantly into two: piano on the one hand and viola, alto saxophone and bass clarinet on the other. The screaming and buzzing of the three wind instruments was subtly punctuated by the piano to create a highly evocative aural equivalent of the warmer, richer hues of autumn.

So to the Warsaw Music Workshop, which gave the final, Tuesday evening concert of the Festival. There was the tentative, fragmentary opening and increasingly dense textures of Edison Denisov's *D-S-C-H* (in honour of Shostakovich), the gentle introspection of Ivana Loudova's *Matinata*, the gradual disintegration and clever stylistic juxtapositions of Tilo Medek's *Stadtpeifer* and the frustrating, everyday musical humdrumming of Gorecki's *Musiquette IV*. There was also Serocki's *Swinging Music* for clarinet, trombone, piano and cello, an engaging allusion to jazz which used no percussion instruments, but nevertheless retained a steady stress on beats 1 and 3! The leader of the Workshop, Zygmunt Krauze, had two works performed: *Soundscape* (1976) for amplified instruments and objects (with an accompanying tape of human sounds) and *Idyll* (1974) for 32 folk instruments.

Krauze's affair with folkery caused reflection on the implications of putting on a festival of contemporary music in a place such as Huddersfield. A great number of today's composers and musicians are involved in a self-conscious retraction from what they see as the evils of industrial society into a more integrated, organic and peaceful world. Such involvement is evident in the albeit different approaches of Krauze and Crumb. Despite the encroachment (and subsequent gradual decline) of the textile industry, West Yorkshire has always remained measured, underlyingly rural and certainly close-knit in its social organisation. Yet the links between the parochial concerns of a close-knit society (the deadly serious business of Yorkshire cricket provides an example of one such concern) and the self-conscious preoccupations of members of touring contemporary music circuses seem tenuous. This tenuousness was reflected in the opening concert of the Festival (given on Friday evening by the Philip Jones Brass Ensemble and the pianist Roger Woodward) when the brass group slipped in a quick, unscheduled

performance of Matthew Locke's *Music for Charles II*. This received more hearty applause from the denizens of Huddersfield than any other piece on the programme.

Perhaps the answer is that that which is genuinely organic and integrated in our culture exists within the predominating, superimposed framework of industrial, capitalist society. Although this framework can be interpreted as being oppressive economically and politically, it nevertheless provides a measure of familiarity and safety. Those who live within it and can be seen as being oppressed by it therefore tend to support and champion it. The people of these parts will consequently prefer the functional tonality of brass band music to the 'stranger' products of contemporary composers. Those who are 'politically aware' among such composers may, on the other hand, wish to criticise and attack the *entire* social status quo by invoking alternatives based on models (such as the 'folk') of more egalitarian mutuality.

The Festival at Huddersfield was important because it provided a forum for the performance and discussion of contemporary music in an area where such things seldom occur. Music students for miles around will clearly benefit from it, for example. It is therefore good that the Festival will continue. The 1979 one (to be held from October 25-31) is bigger and will doubtless be better. There are to be 16 concerts (including several British and world premieres), as well as lectures (Richard Rodney Bennett will introduce his *Sonnet to Orpheus*), workshops and master classes. The performers include Acezentez (from Yugoslavia), the Fitzwilliam String Quartet, Gemini (directed by Peter Wiegold), Vinko Globokar, Alan Hacker, the Halle Orchestra, Howard Riley, Frederic Rzewski, Rohan de Saram, Heinrich Schiff, Denis Smalley, Harry Sparnaay, John Tilbury and James Wood. The Yorkshire Arts Association Young Composers' Competition will again reach its climax during the Festival.

But the Festival might become important for more long term reasons. A contemporary music festival held in a big metropolitan centre (London, Manchester or Leeds, for example) sits quite easily. There does not seem anything inherently incongruous between event and environment. A small centre such as Huddersfield does not allow such complacency. There is an uneasy disparity between the stolid workaday environment and the more cosmopolitan air of the Festival: between an actual integrated culture and those who might wish, through music, self-consciously to create models of integrated culture as an alternative to the predominant mode of social organisation. Such disparities can hardly help but sharpen the many issues facing contemporary music today.

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